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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001235

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AF/S FOR S. HILL
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE
USAID FOR M. COPSON AND E. LOKEN

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: ZANU-PF WINS BY-ELECTIONS AMID LOW TURNOUT,
IMPROVED LOCAL OBSERVATION EFFORT

REF: A. REF: A) HARARE 765

[1](#)B. B) HARARE 764

[1](#)C. C) HARARE 610

Classified By: Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Eric T. Schultz
under Section 1.5 b/d

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) As expected, ruling party candidates held on to two rural parliamentary seats, in Chikomba and Rushinga, in October 7 by-elections. The elections were peaceful but were marred by low voter turnout. Elections for rural district councils in the two constituencies were also held, with the opposition MDC winning only one of the twenty contested seats. On a positive note, the elections demonstrated further improvements in the competence of the independent Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), which observed the elections and conducted a statistically significant parallel vote count by sampling key polling stations. End Summary.

ZANU-PF Retains Rural MP Seats

[1](#)2. (U) ZANU-PF retained control of two rural parliamentary constituencies on October 7 that fell vacant when the ruling party incumbents passed away earlier this year (Ref A). Both districts are located in remote rural areas of Mashonaland Central (Rushinga) and East (Chikomba), provinces that are traditional ZANU-PF strongholds and "no-go" areas for the opposition. In Chikomba, ZANU-PF deputy provincial chairman for Mashonaland East Stephen Chiurayi beat anti-Senate MDC businessman Amos Jiri with 72.6 percent of the vote)

roughly the same margin of victory for ZANU-PF as in the March 2005 parliamentary election. In Rushinga, Lazarus Dokora won 88.3 percent of the vote against the anti-Senate MDC candidate) again, a similar margin to the last election.

¶3. (U) ZESN observers and poloff, accredited as an observer, noted calm on election day with no reports of violence or outright intimidation. However, voter turnout was low, down more than 9,000 voters in each constituency as compared to the March 2005 parliamentary election. Most polling stations were virtually deserted by mid-morning. According to ZESN, electoral officials were generally professional, but some polling station supervisors restricted ZESN access and that of opposition polling agents. ZESN was also critical of the lack of voter education efforts, to which it attributed the large number of voters who were turned away from polling stations.

¶4. (U) ZANU-PF candidates also won 19 out of the 20 rural district council elections in Chikomba and Rushinga, which were also held on October 7. Rural district council elections in the rest of the country will be held on October 28. The sole MDC victory was in Chikomba's Manyene Communal Lands by a marginal of 51 to 49 percent. Daniel Shumba's new United People's Party (Ref B) fielded candidates in seven of the districts, but ZESN observers noted that the party, aligned with the Emmerson Mnangagwa faction of ZANU-PF, put forward little effort.

Local Observers Gain Experience, Credibility

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¶5. (U) Local observation group ZESN used the elections to give their observers additional experience and to refine their parallel vote count methodology. ZESN conducted pre-election visits to the two areas and on election day fielded 41 accredited observers in each constituency. Through a mix of mobile and stationary teams, ZESN collected results from a sampling of polling stations that, through statistical extrapolation, closely mirrored and confirmed the official tabulation.

Comment

¶6. (C) Due to the ruling party's stranglehold over the Mashonaland provinces, the election outcome was never in doubt. The more important outcome was ZESN's performance. Building on its successful parallel count in the May 2006 by-election in the urban Budiriro constituency (Ref C), ZESN demonstrated it is capable of conducting a credible parallel vote count in a traditional ZANU-PF rural constituency, albeit using statistical sampling. As the nation braces for key, nationwide elections in coming years, ZESN is wisely using the by-elections and the upcoming rural council elections as important building blocks to test and refine its capabilities. One of the best ways for donors, including the USG, to support democracy in Zimbabwe is by sustained assistance to ZESN's development.
SCHULTZ